



Chuckwagon on the move. Bedrolls stacked to the wagon bows and dishpan banging behind, the lordly cook drives to the next camp. Photograph by Erwin E. Smith. Courtesy, Mrs. L. M. Pettis and the Library of Congress.

emigrants, and Army forts, and where young stock was especially in demand. By 1869 a million cattle were grazing within the borders of the Colorado Territory and many predicted that it would become "the cattle pasture of the world."

Despite proof that Longhorns could survive cold winters, most Texas ranchers refused to believe it until they saw for themselves—and see they did. In the spring and summer of 1873 they drove several hundred thousand cattle north along the Chisholm Trail, but at Abilene they found few buyers. The Panic of 1873 had hit the Nation. Rather than drive the cattle back to Texas, the drovers left them on the prairies of Kansas and Missouri with the expectation that they would die during the winter. But in the spring, when the drovers returned, they found that the Longhorns had not only survived but had improved.

It became apparent that steers maturing in the north fattened more than in Texas. For this reason, and with proof in hand that

the animals could survive, many of the bigger Texas spreads began branching out northward. They continued to use their Texas ranches as breeding places, but they maintained finishing ranges in the northern territories. Texas cattle were trailed a thousand miles to "double-winter" on the grass ranges of Wyoming, Montana, or Dakota, and then shipped to the Chicago slaughterhouses. Northern ranchers also obtained substantial numbers of cattle, English breeds, driven eastward over the mountains, from Oregon, Washington, and Idaho.

The Texas cowboys who pushed the cattle northward were full of exuberance and confidence, though they faced heat and thirst, stampedes and Indians, rustlers and armed homesteaders. They were the men who established the range cattle industry on the Great Plains and in the Rocky Mountain States. They taught their trade to the cowboys there just as they had learned it from the Mexicans and the Mexicans from the Spaniards. Such prominent cattlemen as Teddy Blue Abbott, Charlie Siringo, and Granville Stuart, along with a host of others, have testified that development



In the dust with the "drags"—weaker cattle that dropped behind the drive. As the day lengthened, so did the thirst of the cowboys. Photograph by Erwin E. Smith. Courtesy, Mrs. L. M. Pettis and the Library of Congress.

of the open range cattle industry was from first to last largely a Texas story.

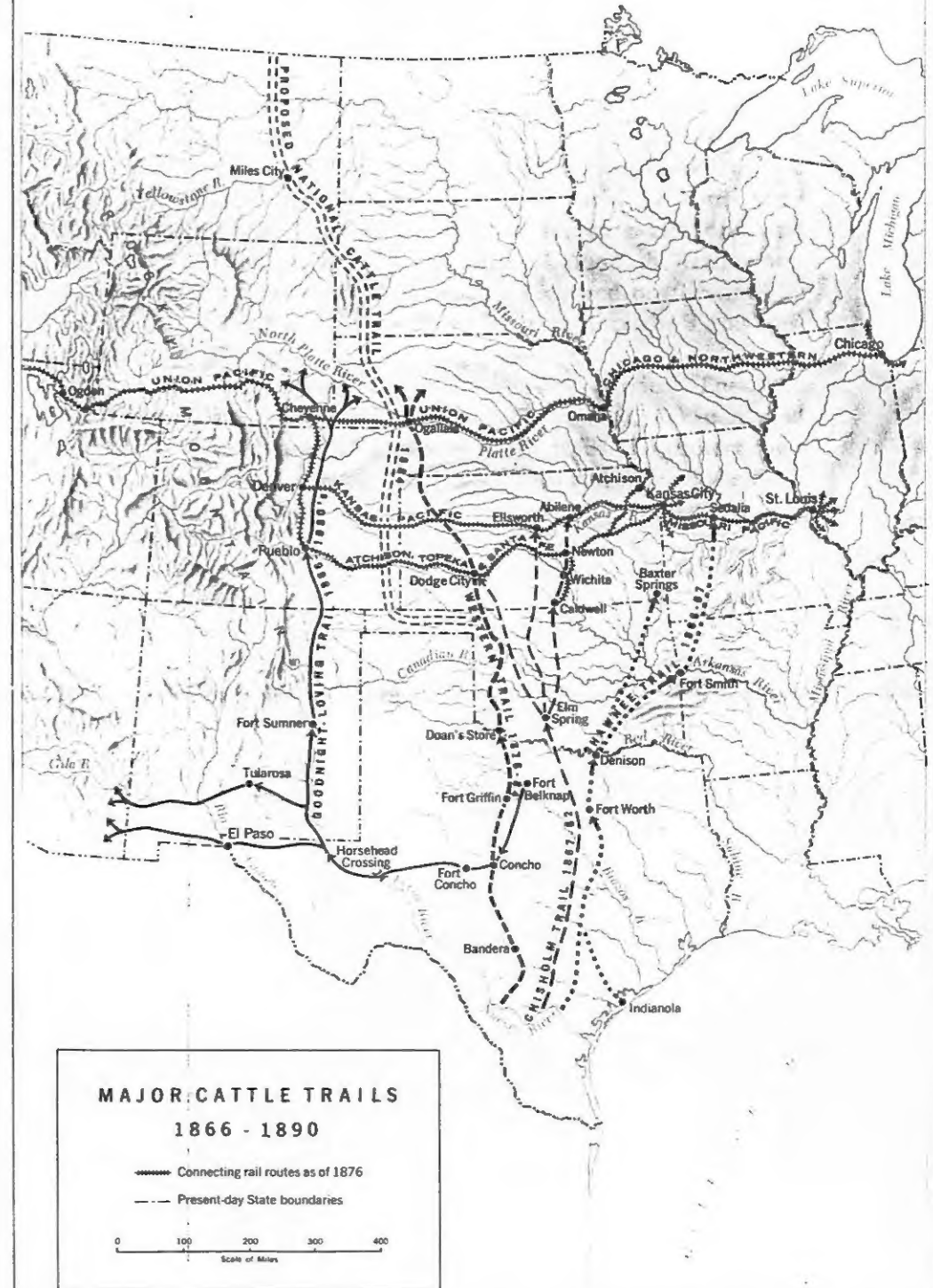
The organization and routine of the trail drive was a serious business. As many as 2,500 cattle were collected in south Texas and consigned by the owners to the care and authority of the trail boss for delivery at a railhead or stocking ranch, which might be 1,500 miles or more distant. Ten to twelve hands handled the herd, along with the cook and a youthful apprentice who cared for the remuda of a hundred or more horses. The cowboys sometimes spent 14 to 16 hours a day in the saddle—hard, lonely, and monotonous work—for \$30 a month and board.

The long, sinuous line of Longhorns, stretching out like a long multicolored ribbon, soon became broken to the trail, and the daily routine became automatic. The trail itself, because of the passage of hundreds of thousands of cattle, was easily recognized and easily followed. Depending in part on the grass available, it consisted of scores of irregular cowpaths that formed a single passageway, which widened and narrowed and twisted and turned according to the terrain—but led ever northward.

The number of cattle driven north each year was large. In the peak year 1871, cowhands probably drove 700,000 Texas cattle to Kansas railheads, and between 1866 and 1885 millions of head moved to the railheads and northern ranges. In the level and open country drovers were seldom out of sight of other herds. From a hilltop in Nebraska, one cowboy saw 7 herds to the rear of his own and 8 in front, while the dust of 13 more could be observed across the North Platte. "All the cattle in the world seemed to be coming up from Texas," he declared. When a thunderstorm stampeded 11 trail herds, including about 30,000 Longhorns, which were waiting to cross the Red River at Doan's Store in 1882, it took 120 cowboys 10 days to unscramble the cattle, reassemble the herds, and get them moving again.

#### FENCES, QUARANTINES, AND INDIANS

The trail herders usually met bitter opposition from the farmers of Kansas and Missouri, resentful because the Texas, or Spanish, fever ravaged their small herds and milk cows. The Longhorns seemed to be immune, but the fever tick that rode north with





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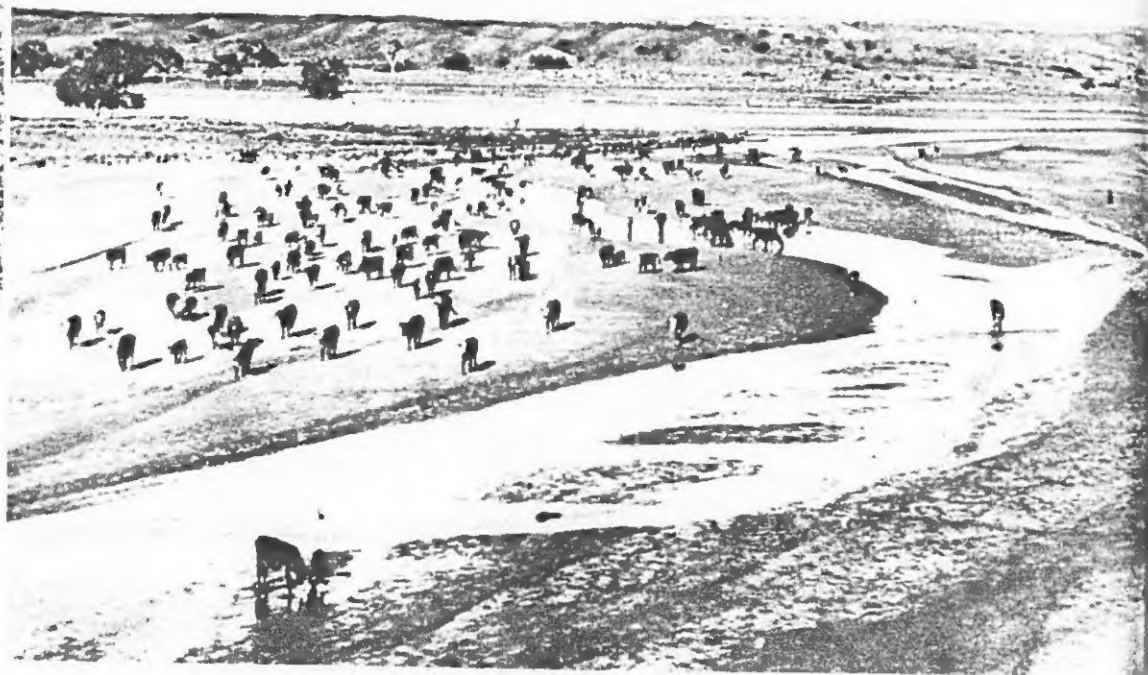
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comprised about 44 percent of the total land area of the United States.

This was land that the farmer—accustomed to the timbered, well-watered East—could not farm with his usual methods and machinery. This was land that the Plains Indians and the buffalo had called home for many generations. The demise of Indian power



Water was as necessary as "free grass and air" to the Western rancher. Most Plains streams seasonally rose and fell. Photograph by Erwin E. Smith. Courtesy, Mrs. L. M. Pettis and the Library of Congress.

in this region coincided with the slaughter of the great buffalo herds, on which the Indian economy depended. Just after the Civil War, buffalo hides became valuable for their leather, and the hide men did their bloody work exceedingly well and amazingly fast. In 1880 the last buffalo herds were sighted on the southern plains and only a few years later in the north. The Plains tribes took to

the warpath, the troops clashed with them, and many soldiers and braves died before the reservations became the home of once-proud tribes of Indians.

The Government had no immediate use for these public lands, which could be appropriated by the first men to occupy them. The land constituted "free grass" and "free water," collectively known as "free air." To this open range were trailed hundreds of thousands of cattle, almost all driven up from Texas as yearlings and 2-year-olds. There they were crossed with Eastern cattle, fattened on the "free air," and sold for high prices at the nearest railhead. With little more than a few skilled cowhands and a branding iron, a man could convert the grazing land into top steers and grow rich.

#### RANCH LIFE

The process by which a man became a rancher was not complicated. Finding a live stream, hopefully with natural boundaries surrounding it to hold his cattle, the prospective rancher claimed the land along the stream for 10 to 15 miles and as far back as the water divide. If a waterhole was the only source of water in the vicinity, he selected his lands around the hole and effectively controlled all the surrounding acres of grass. Proof of ownership, although tenuous, was not often contested until the homesteaders arrived. Under questioning a rancher might refer to one of the Federal laws, such as the Homestead Act or the Desert Land Act, but he usually advised those so inquisitive and foolish as to ask proof of ownership to "vamoose the ranch" or "pull your freight, pronto."

At first ranch life was hard and lonely. The pioneer rancher subsisted largely on beans, bacon, and coffee. He fought Indians, wolves, blizzards, rattlers, rustlers—and his own kind. But he also watched his cattle fatten and multiply and hired cowboys to tend them. For some hands it was a 100-mile ride from the bunkhouse to the front gate. Later a ranchhouse and scattered outbuildings would replace the wickiup, and other evidences of civilization would follow.

The cattle kings were men apart—men such as John Chisum, Granville Stuart, Charles Goodnight, and John Wesley Hiff. They were strong men—men who conquered the West. What they ac-



Colorado rancher John W. Iliff purchased foundation stock from Oliver Loving and Charles Goodnight. His herds grazed thousands of acres in the South Platte Valley. Courtesy, Western History Collection, Denver Public Library.

Charles Goodnight, cofounder of the Goodnight-Loving Trail, was one of the first cattlemen in the Texas Panhandle. Courtesy, Western History Collection, Denver Public Library.



Granville Stuart, pioneer Montana cattleman, was a leader of the Vigilance Committee, organized in 1884 by ranchers in Montana Territory to protect their stock. Courtesy, Montana Historical Society.

Joseph G. McCoy, cattle dealer, established cattle shipping facilities at Abilene in 1867 and encouraged Texans to make the first drives to Kansas railheads. Courtesy, University of Illinois Library.



complished was done literally with their bare hands. They endured as many dangers and hardships as any man on any frontier. Little wonder that they later would look back with such pride at what they had done.

#### BOOM ON THE RANGE

About 1880 the range cattle industry entered a boom period. The rush to the cow country was in many ways similar to the rush to the goldfields. The cause certainly was the same—the prospect of quick wealth in a new country that seemed to offer unlimited opportunity for the ambitious. “Cotton was once crowned king, but grass is now,” declared an Eastern livestock journal.

The stampede to the cattle lands was literally worldwide. It attracted boomers from the East, from Canada and Australia, and from the British Isles. Youths from Eastern farms and factories, savings strapped to their waists, eager for wealth and adventure, packed the trains. The mania spread to Europe. When an English parliamentary committee reported a 33-percent return to stockowners, the desire to participate in the profits of American ranching, personally or as an investor, became a craze among the British.

As British capital had been involved in the mining frontier and had helped build the American railroad system, so it figured prominently in the growth of the range cattle industry. The largest cattle companies operating in the United States in the 1880's were formed in England and Scotland. British investors followed Horace Greeley's advice to “go West”—at least they sent their money in that direction to the amount of \$17 million during the short-lived boom. Gouty squires who may or may not have known the difference between a steer and a heifer discussed the niceties of the spring roundup over port and nuts.

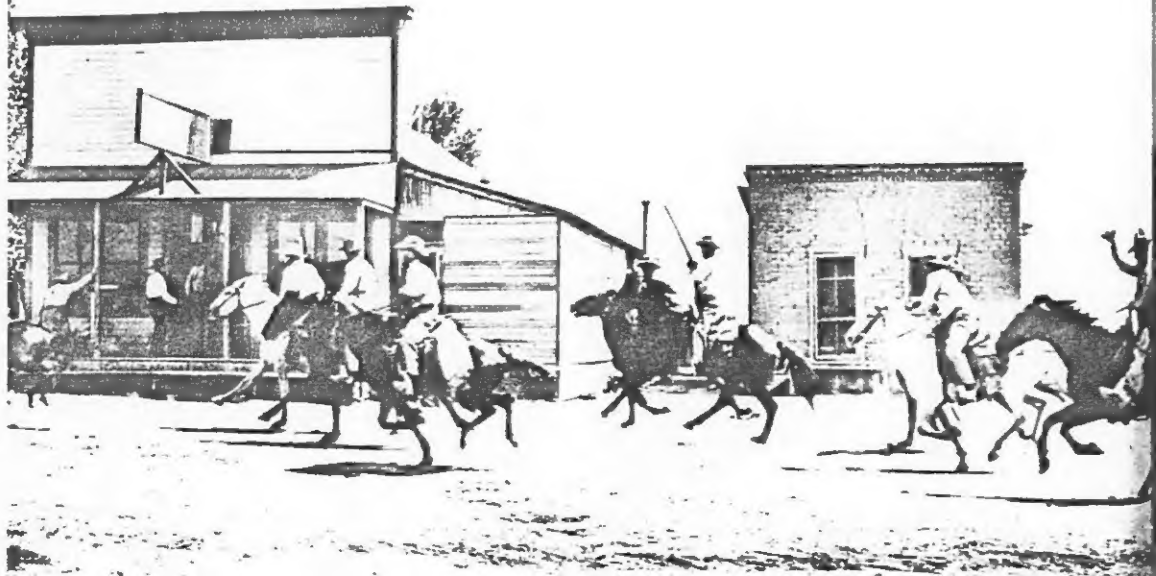
Proper Bostonians and staid New Yorkers joined the rush to invest in the cattle industry. In a single year 20 corporations, capitalized at more than \$12 million, were organized under Wyoming laws. In some transactions the buyer never saw a head of his purchase, nor possessed more than a fraction of the purchase money. Uncontrolled speculation ensued. Swindlers flourished, and paper companies without an acre of land or a single steer sold stock to a gullible and eager public.



Nor could the tally books of brokers always be trusted. When ranchers sold large herds, the transactions often represented little more than rough estimates of the cattle involved, a generous figure being inserted for the year's calf crop and on rare occasions an allowance for losses from severe winters, diseases, or other causes. Such a system gave rise to many stories, such as one that made the rounds in Cheyenne. A group of cattlemen purportedly bellied up to a local bar during a long, hard winter and were gloomily speculating on their probable losses. "Cheer up, boys," said one, setting up drinks for the house, "the books won't freeze."

After 1880 the demand for cattle to stock the northern ranges, which increased yearly, taxed the available supply and drove prices upward. Texas ranchers sent increased numbers of head northward, but the demand was still greater than the supply. "Cattle, cattle, more cattle" was the slogan of the grass country from north Texas to Canada. Answering this call, in 1884 trail drivers pointed north approximately 416,000 head of Texas cattle, the greatest number since 1871.

Some thirsty hands ride into town. The life of the cowhand was mostly work and little play. Photograph by Erwin E. Smith. Courtesy, Mrs. L. M. Pettis and the Library of Congress.



## BEGINNING OF THE END

Because of the enormous flow of capital into the cattle country, the high prices, and the spectacular profits, there could be but one result: the number of cattle would soon exceed the carrying capacity of the range. In a word, overgrazing would result. Alarmed cattlemen began to fear for the future. There was no natural limit to the number of cattle that could be bred in Texas and sent up the trail, but even the celebrated Longhorn could not fatten on air alone. The good pastures were being overgrazed, the marginal lands were crowded, and no new area of grass was available for an escape valve. The arid country, devastated by winter blizzards, could support the vast herds only under optimum weather conditions. One bad winter would ruin thousands of investors and ranch owners and kill millions of cattle. As the first half of the 1880's passed, each spring cattlemen accepted their winter losses, being thankful that the toll was no greater. But the development of the sheep industry and the invasion of the homesteaders were even greater threats than weather conditions.

Cattle raising was dangerous in arid country. In a bad year the results were disastrous. This photograph was taken in Roswell, New Mexico. Courtesy, National Archives.





Sheep have always figured prominently in the economy of the West. The sheepman led a lonely life and faced the violent antagonism of the cattlemen. Photograph by Lee Moorhouse. Courtesy, Photographic Bureau, University of Oregon.

### *"Woolies" and "Wars"*

Less renowned in story and song and less romantic in its appeal to the public than the cattle industry, the sheep industry was nevertheless of considerable economic importance in the historic West. During the post-Civil War period, it too struggled for a place in the Western sun. Sheepmen used the cattlemen's range and in many ways operated on the same basic principles—utilizing the grass and water of the public domain and depending on trail drives to reach markets.

The Spaniards introduced sheep into present California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, usually in the mission establishments. In 1779 the Hopi pueblos probably grazed 30,000 sheep, and one California mission reported 100,000 in its herd. But New Mexico was the leading center. Between 1821 and 1846 its herders drove thousands of head annually to Mexico. The year after the United States acquired the Southwest in 1848, the California gold

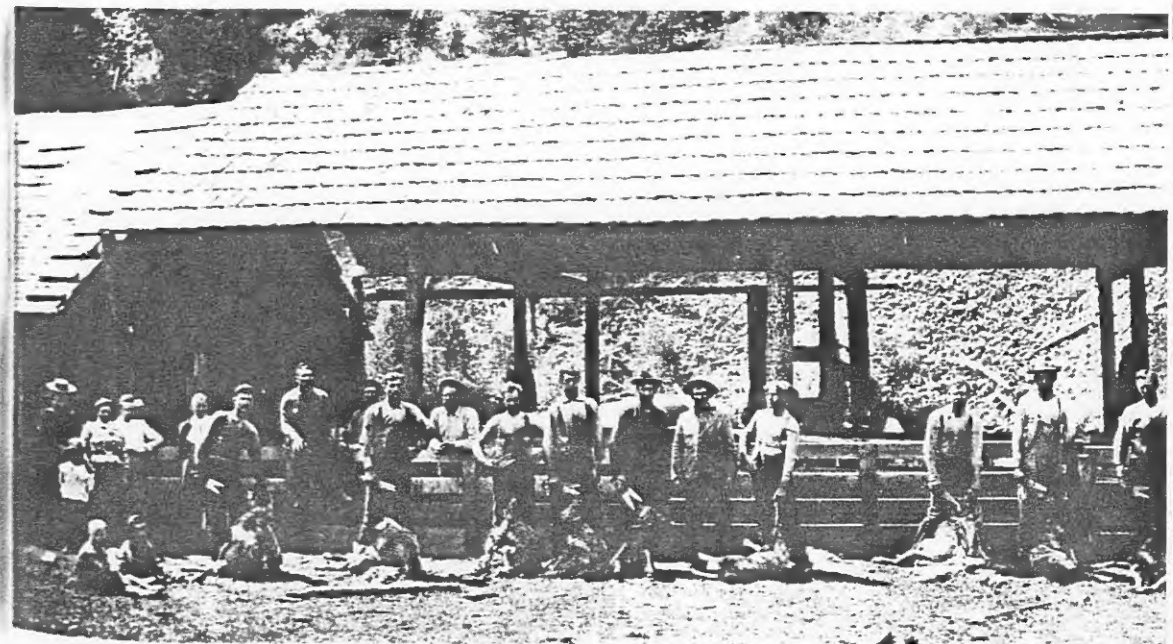
### *Historical Background*

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rush furnished a new market. In the 1850's half a million head moved from New Mexico Territory to the Mother Lode country, which paid fabulous prices until California ranches could satisfy the demand. Soon thousands of sheep landed in Pacific ports to stock California ranches. Many California counties grazed from 40,000 to 300,000 head, and some ranchers drove sheep to other States or Territories. After 1853 California ranchers found a ready wool market in San Francisco.

By 1865 New Mexican shepherds were grazing their sheep in eastern Colorado Territory, which was soon dotted with herds. In 1876, by which time sheep raising had spread to other parts of the Territory, the total number ran into the hundreds of thousands. New Mexicans also drove the first sheep into Utah from the south, and Mormons drove them in from the east. Mormon immigrants brought in spinning wheels, looms, and cards; and woolen manufacture thrived. In 1882, 10 woolen mills were operating. During the 1880's Texas assumed a position of first importance in sheep husbandry. In 1884 more than 8 million sheep grazed its ranges. Sheep ranching occurred on a smaller scale in Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, the Dakotas, Washington, and Oregon. These States had no large ranches, but many small stockmen raised sheep.

Migrants assisted at shearing time. Like harvest hands, they followed the season north from the Southwest into the Rocky Mountains and Canada. Courtesy, Photographic Bureau, University of Oregon.







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